



# TOWN OF STRATFORD

## HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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For  
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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL # 7069  
AN ACT CONCERNING ACCESS TO ORAL HEALTH CARE  
SUBMITTED TO THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE  
CT GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

MARCH 5, 2007

To Senator Handley, and Representative Peggy Sayers and All Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Beth Strimpel. I am the Nursing Supervisor of the Stratford Health Department in Stratford, CT. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to communicate to your Committee today. This written testimony is a strong indication of my support for HB 7069, An Act Concerning Access to Oral Health Care.

I am currently the Acting Dental Clinic Administrator - coordinating services at our School based dental clinic. The Stratford Health Department has operated a school based dental clinic for over 40 years serving the children of families in need including the uninsured and Husky beneficiaries. In our community of 50,000, we can meet the needs of approximately 160- 200 children per year. However the demand is greater than our capacity to care for our community with the limited resources we have available to us.

Lack of access to oral health care is a growing concern for Connecticut residents of all ages. Too few employers subsidize the cost of dental insurance and competing priorities and essential necessities such as food and rent often preclude low and moderate-income populations from obtaining preventive dental care. The problem is particularly acute for children and youth who may qualify for the State Husky insurance program but whose families find it difficult to impossible to find providers who are willing to serve them owing to the low reimbursement rate in our state for Husky beneficiaries.

More than six years ago, legal aid attorneys filed a lawsuit against the state for not providing dental care to children on HUSKY as provided by federal Medicaid law and regulation. With no settlement in sight, legislation is necessary to make sure that these kids do not suffer for another year. We had hoped that Governor Rell's proposed budget would support raising these rates that have remained at the same level since 1993 and make it unaffordable for most dentists to see

children on the state's Medicaid plan. We believe that the Governor's omission of this important upgrade in the proposed biennial budget is short-sighted and perpetuates a serious and growing health problem among Connecticut children on the state's Medicaid Plan.

The safety net that currently exists is not adequate to meet the needs and must be augmented by greater participation from the private dental provider sector. Community health centers, local health department dental clinics and school based dental clinics currently provide the majority of care to the Husky population and will undoubtedly remain a vital part of the provider network. But the resources in our dental provider safety net are insufficient to meet the demand and to prevent dental problems from advancing to serious disease due to lack of early and routine intervention. We often see children with advanced decay on their initial visit, or in screenings we provide in the schools. Often there are third graders who have never seen a dentist before. Finding specialists (oral surgeons, periodontists) who are Husky providers is a monumental, time consuming, and often unsuccessful task.

Raised bill # 7069 offers hope of changing that reality by increasing the reimbursement rate. We strongly support legislation that would raise dental reimbursement rates to at least the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile of dentists' fees or about \$14.50 per child per month. The cost of this increase would prevent significant pain and suffering as well as the medical and other costs incurred across the health system now due to lack of preventive dental care to HUSKY children. And, the benefits would be huge.

Dental problems are among the most preventable of all diseases yet the chronic infection that causes tooth decay is responsible for more missed school days than any other health problem, and one of the top two reasons children visit the emergency rooms during the day. I was shocked to learn that tooth decay is five times more common than asthma, and is the single most common chronic disease among children. And I am a public health nurse! Poor dental health is also strongly associated with poor overall health. These problems can be ameliorated by expanding access to oral health care for all children and families in Connecticut.

We ask that you respond to the clear data that shows the importance of early and regular dental care, the lack of access among HUSKY children and that rate increases will go a long way in fixing this problem. Raised bill # 7069 with the recommended changes in proposed wording, will put us on that path. I urge you to support this legislation. Thank you for considering my comments.